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Socrates Redivivus

Suzanne Stern-Gillet
University of Bolton

Lindsay Judson and Vassilis Karasmanis (eds.), *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2006, ISBN: 0-19-927613-7, £40.00

Remembering Socrates is a collection of twelve papers presented at a conference held in 2001 in Athens and Delphi to commemorate the 2400th anniversary of Socrates' death. Since the full proceedings had been edited by V. Karasmanis under the title *Socrates: 2400 Hundred Years Since His Death* (Delphi: European Cultural Centre of Delphi, 2004), the publication of the present volume, which contains a selection of the papers presented in 2001, gave the editors (and, presumably, the authors) the opportunity for a second process of distillation. The yield is as follows: C. Natali: 'Socrates' Dialectic in Xenophon's *Memorabilia'*; G. Seel, 'If you Know What is Best, you Do it: Socratic Intellectualism in Xenophon and Plato'; C.H. Kahn, 'Socrates and Hedonism'; T. Irwin, 'Socrates and Euthyphro: The Argument and its Revival'; L. Brown, 'Did Socrates Agree to Obey the Laws of Athens?'; V. Politis, '*Aporia* and Searching in the Early Plato'; D. Charles, 'Types of definition in the *Meno'*; V. Karasmanis, 'Definition in Plato's *Meno*'; T. Scaltsas, 'Sharing a Property'; C.C.W. Taylor, 'Socrates the Sophist'; J.M. Cooper, 'Arcesilaus: Socratic and Sceptic', M. Frede: 'The Early Christian Reception of Socrates'.

The intriguing title of the book prompts the questions 'how is "to remember" to be interpreted in this context?', 'who is supposed to remember, or to have remembered, Socrates: the authors or the subjects of the articles?' While the former could at best commemorate Socrates as opposed to remembering him, some of the latter never were in a position to 'remember' him, at least if we keep to the conventional sense of the verb, namely to recall acquaintance with particulars encountered in the past. As it is, the contributors simply interpret in their various ways the evidence contained in a number of ancient sources which deal with Socrates and Socratic themes. Since the editors appear to have decided to give the contributors a free hand, there is no point in drawing attention to obvious gaps in the treatment of the available evidence, such as Aristotle's views on Socrates. As a result, the present collection is, and could hardly have avoided being, a hotchpotch, both methodologically and philosophically. Yet it is nonetheless, in more ways than one, a superior hotchpotch.

In choosing to concentrate on Xenophon's Socratic reminiscences in the *Memorabilia*, Carlo Natali and Gerhard Seel, alone of all the contributors, interpret memory and remembering *proprio sensu*. Theirs are timely pieces which usefully complement the current reassessment of Xenophon's Socratic writings, a reassessment to which the new Belles-Lettres edition (2000) of the *Memorabilia* by M. Bandini and L.-A. Dorion's splendidly testifies. Natali is concerned to highlight differences between Xenophon's and Plato's accounts of Socrates' dialectics and ethical intellectualism. His close reading of selected passages in the *Memorabilia* supports his contention that Xenophon's Socrates had a richer, more positive, conception of dialectics and the moral life than his counterpart in Plato's dialogues, at least as he is ordinarily interpreted. Indeed, so Natali argues, the Socrates of the *Memorabilia* is consistently portrayed as actively seeking to improve his interlocutors as men and citizens, as opposed to merely confuting them. Furthermore, he does offer definitions of ethical concepts, and expects his definitions to be action-guiding. To be so, they must be adopted by agents whose self-control (*enkrateia*) and moderation (*sōphrosunē*) are sufficiently developed to enable them to profit from the moral knowledge that Socrates seeks to impart. In so building *enkrateia* into moral knowledge, Xenophon's Socrates, as interpreted by Natali, succeeded where Plato's Socrates did not, namely in accommodating passion and emotion into his conception of the best life for humans to lead.

Seel covers much the same exegetical ground as Natali, but with a heavier philosophical hand. To analyse the views that Xenophon ascribes to Socrates, he relies on an oversimplified modern taxonomy of ethical theories, without pausing to ask himself how far such taxonomy can assist us in clarifying the ethical views of the ancients. Consequentialism is taken to be the only alternative to a deontological approach to morality. Deontology itself receives the thinnest characterisation possible so as to encompass both Kant's ethics and the view, as expressed by Socrates at *Mem.* IV.5.6 (Seel's T15), that self-control enables a person to acquire the knowledge of what is good and bad, a knowledge that constitutes the most reliable guide to action in practical matters. Unsurprisingly, a close examination of the text itself later leads Seel to conclude that Xenophon's Socrates is not, after all, a pure deontologist, but that his version of intellectualism, which is itself 'meta-ethical' in nature, also

includes elements of prudentialism and relativism. Seel concludes that although Xenophon's account of Socrates' intellectualism is not entirely consistent, it is nonetheless historically valuable in so far as it largely overlaps with the picture presented in Plato's so-called 'early' dialogues.

For most of the other contributors to the volume, 'remembering Socrates' merely consists in writing an article about one or the other of the major Socratic themes in Plato's dialogues. So it is with C.H. Kahn who addresses the cluster of issues centring on Socrates' defence of hedonism in the *Protagoras*. Far from representing the views of either the historical Socrates or indeed of Plato himself, Socrates' formulation of the doctrine of hedonism, so Kahn argues, is a cunning move on Plato's part to highlight Protagoras' lack of philosophical acumen before creating the occasion for Socrates to formulate his famous definition of *akrasia* as miscalculation and to introduce, as stemming from it, his equally famous thesis of the unity of the virtues. Any interpretation that succeeds in knitting together Socrates' three main arguments in that puzzling dialogue is much to be welcomed, and Kahn's warrants the wide diffusion that he is obviously looking for it. It might have been gracious, all the same, to inform the reader that this particular article had already appeared, in an identical form, not only in Karasmanis (2004), but also in A. Havliček and F. Karfik (edd.) *Plato's Protagoras: proceedings of the third symposium platonicum pragense*, Prague, Oikoumene, 2003.

Lesley Brown, for her part, does acknowledge the two collections in which her analysis of the central argument in the *Crito* had appeared before being included in the present volume. Her main concern lies with the grounds of political obligation, and her position is that no agreement can generate an obligation unless it has been publicly expressed, and the extent of its binding force recognised by the parties concerned. This view leads her to dismiss the claims variously mooted in the *Crito* that Socrates, by remaining in Athens all his adult life and raising his family there, had entered into a tacit agreement with the laws of the city to abide by their decrees and, therefore, at the particular juncture recalled in the dialogue, to remain in prison to serve the death sentence that had been voted by the assembly. Political obligation, she argues, is relevantly similar to the obligation to keep a promise. Just as a promise is not binding unless the promisor has expressed, in whatever public form is

appropriate, his intention of carrying it out, tacit consent to obey the laws, however 'obtained', has no sufficient performative force to ground a moral obligation. Brown in effect transposes to the *Crito* the disagreement between Locke and Hume over the grounds of political obligation. Although one might well deplore the inevitable anachronism that such an exercise involves, her piece makes for fascinating reading and should be of particular interest to political philosophers.

Terence Irwin revisits the central argument of the *Euthyphro*. A comparison between Plato's handling of definition in that and other dialogues leads him to argue that the object of Socrates' quest in the *Euthyphro* is the metaphysical property that causes all pious things to be so, and not, as might appear at certain stages of the argument, a concept, such as god-beloved, that is coextensive with the *definiendum*. This is hardly a novel thesis and, on its own, would not substantially have enhanced our understanding of this much studied dialogue. More interestingly, in the second part of his article, Irwin turns, in the first place, to mediaeval treatments of the *Euthyphro* problem, likely either to have been undertaken as a result of reading Plato's dialogue (Augustine) or independently of it (Aquinas and Scotus). Later still, Socrates' arguments against what is now called theological voluntarism were adapted, so Irwin shows, by the Cambridge Platonists and their contemporaries to fight battles of their own. Thus Cudworth directed it against moral positivism, and Clarke used in the hope of undermining Hobbes' attempt to ground the laws of nature in divine commands. Although just about developed enough to whet the reader's interest, this second, historical, section of Irwin's article is yet too brief to do justice to the long posterity of the Euthyphro argument.

The problem of definition is also taken up by David Charles and Vassilis Karasmanis, this time in the framework of the *Meno*. Charles' thesis is that Socrates asks, not for one, but for two different kinds of definition of virtue, the one to give the meaning of the word 'virtue', the other to give an account of the essence of the thing denoted by the word. A detailed analysis of the passages involved leads Charles to conclude that Socrates fails to keep these two types of definition separate, and that, as a result, the main quest of the *Meno* is hampered by a serious confusion. In the concluding section of his article, Charles suggests that this very confusion, which led the Platonic Socrates to reformulate Meno's paradox at 80 E 2-5, is likely also to have

constituted a decisive element in Plato's postulation of the theory of recollection, a theory which later led him, in turn, to posit the existence of other-worldly entities. One might well wonder at this point whether the theory of Forms could really have been the outcome of definitional confusion or, more likely, whether Socrates' lack of interest in keeping the two kinds of definition separate was itself a sign that Plato was by then well on his way to the Forms.

Vassilis Karasmanis' account of the taxonomy of definition in the *Meno* is a model of clarity. Having briefly set out Meno's three attempted definitions of virtue and Socrates' three definitions of space within the context not only of the dialogue but also of the Platonic corpus as a whole and the history of geometry at the Classical age, Karasmanis assesses the contribution that each attempt makes to Plato's evolving thoughts on the nature of definition. He concludes that for most of his writing life '…although Plato gives techniques to refute bad definitions, and also some rules that a good definition must obey, still he does not have a method for finding definitions' (p. 141). Only in the *Sophist*, Karasmanis suggests, will Plato offer fresh insights into that topic. Although Karasmanis' choice of subject matter does not give him much scope for deploying philosophical originality, his article will be of value to all serious readers of the dialogue, from undergraduates to seasoned scholars.

The nature of *aporia* in Plato's so-called early dialogues is a rare area of (almost) consensus amongst scholars. This is the happy state of affairs that Vasilis Politis would like to unsettle. It is simply not true, he claims, that the *Theaetetus* marks a turning point in Plato's presentation of Socrates, from gadfly which keeps the Athenian horse awake, to midwife of the mind who causes his interlocutors to formulate views of their own. Even in the *Protagoras* and the *Meno*, so Politis claims, *aporia* does not only denote a condition of 'speechlessness and inarticulateness in the face of Socrates' demand for definitions' (p. 96). Far from it, since it also demonstrably refers to a state of puzzlement generated by an inability to settle between two opposing viewpoints on the same philosophical question. While *aporia* in the first sense is cathartic and best illustrated by Laches' candid acknowledgement of his inability to define the human quality he thought he knew best (194 A sqq), *aporia* in the second sense is 'zētētic' and clearly exemplified both in the discussion between Protagoras and Socrates as to whether or not virtue can be taught

(324 D and 348 C) and in Socrates' exchange with Meno's slave. While Politis' interesting distinction is likely to prompt most of us to revisit a number of passages in the corpus, it fails, at first blush, wholly to convince. Indeed the expression 'the *aporia* that you puzzle over' (*hē aporia hēn su aporeis*, 324 E 1-2), which is Politis' main piece of evidence in favour of the 'zētētic' kind of *aporia*, is not uttered by Socrates but by Protagoras. Furthermore, the context of occurrence reveals that, appearances notwithstanding, neither man is actually in a state of puzzlement. As for Meno's slave, his *aporia* is not really 'zētētic'; rather than puzzling over two contradictory answers to Socrates' question, he goes first, unhesitatingly, for one solution before being firmly led to 'see' that the other solution is the correct one.

For Theodore Scaltsas, Socrates is a pretext for developing what he hopes to be a novel theory of plural predication. Three Stephanus pages of the *Hippias Major* (300-303) provide him with an angle from which to address this currently much debated metaphysical problem. Hippias holds that, for any property, if two subjects possess it together, it necessarily follows that each possesses it individually, and if each subject possesses the property individually, it necessarily follows that both together possess it. Socrates retorts that if Hippias and Socrates are two, it does not necessarily follow that each separately is two, and that if each is one, it does not necessarily follow that the two together are one. Scaltsas translates the disagreement between Hippias and Socrates into the terminology of recent metaphysical theories, before suggesting that 'plural subjecthood is, so to speak, an activity of the subjects involved ('subject-ing'), not an entity that comes about from them' (155). The argument at this point becomes hard to follow in spite of Scaltsas' several repetitions of its main point. Perhaps because of his commitment to the goal of theoretical parsimony, his solution appears decidedly un-Platonic. A better way to 'remember' Socrates, one might have thought, would have been to interpret the pages in question of the *Hippias Major* in the light of the longish passage in the *Phaedo* where Socrates ascribes a causal function to the forms: '... wouldn't you hesitate to say that when one is added to one the addition is the cause of there coming to be two, or that when one is divided the division is the cause? Would you not loudly protest that the only way you know of, by which anything comes to be, is by its participating in the special being in which it does participate; and that in the case just mentioned you know of no other cause of there coming to be two save coming to participate in duality, in which

everything that is to be two must participate, just as anything that is to be one must participate in unity; all these divisions and additions and suchlike subtleties you would have nothing to do with' (101 B9 – C8, tr. Hackforth). Might it be that the three pages in question of the *Hippias Major* would best be interpreted proleptically, as containing a puzzle that would soon lead Plato's Socrates to the full-blown metaphysics of the *Phaedo*? Now *that* would have been a pertinent question to ask.

The authors of the last three articles aim at describing how the historical Socrates was viewed by some of his successors, both near and not so near. In an elegantly short and exegetically neat piece, C.C.W. Taylor shows how Plato's assessment of Socrates' philosophical persona evolved over time. While Socrates is presented in the *Meno* and the *Protagoras* as a knower and a genuine philosopher, it is suggested in the *Sophist* that he was a sophist, albeit a sophist of a noble kind, whose self-appointed task consisted in disinterestedly motivating others to seek truth and knowledge. Through a detailed examination of the relevant pages of the *Sophist* (216 sqq) and with frequent references to other dialogues, Taylor argues cautiously yet effectively that the definition of the sophist that is there presented fits the Platonic Socrates not too badly. Like the Sophists, Socrates enjoyed engaging young men in prolonged conversations (*adoleschiai*), used the quasi mesmerizing effect that he had upon them to seek to further their education in *aretē*, and considered that being subjected to cross-examination and refutation was a necessary propaedeutic process to true learning. Yet, to the extent that the pursuit of truth and the improvement of the soul of his young interlocutors were Socrates' overriding aims, he was a sophist of a different, higher, order from those who went by that name at the time. Does all this mean that the later Plato thought noble sophistry to be more like plain sophistry than philosophy? Does this mean that he would by then have denied his master the title of philosopher, understood as one who conducts systematic investigations into 'the fundamental structure of reality' (168)? Not without a touch of reluctance, Taylor admits that this might well have been so.

In a meticulously researched piece drawing mainly on the writings of Cicero and Sextus Empiricus, John Cooper seeks to shed light on the difficult problem of what modern scholarship labels 'Academic scepticism', a descriptor that had no currency in antiquity. He focuses on the figure of Arcesilaus, who headed the

Academy in the mid-270s, and was instrumental in setting it on the road to 'scepticism'. Arcesilaus' devotion to the figure of Socrates, so Cooper argues in Cicero's wake, accounts for his otherwise atypical pedagogic methods. Having urged his aspiring pupils to put forward their own views, Arcesilaus would engage in adversarial argument with them and, in the Socratic manner, rely on elenctic dialectics to refute whichever position they had adopted. Such was his way of suggesting to them - without ever, of course, asserting it dogmatically - that nothing certain can be grasped by either the senses or the mind and, therefore, that the suspension of judgment in all matters is the only possible attitude. So, Cooper asks, could Arcesilaus, after all, properly be described as a sceptic in the sense in which the new Pyrrhoneans of the first century A.D. understood the term, namely as one who inquires into philosophical questions, ponders them, but does not come to any definite conclusions on any of them? Yes and no, goes Cooper's answer. Arcesilaus was a sceptic in so far as his philosophical life conformed to the ideal later defined by the new Pyrrhoneans. But he was not a sceptic in so far as his grounds for suspending judgment were anything but Pyrrhonean. Indeed Arcesilaus withheld assent because his passionate commitment to what he interpreted as the Socratic ideal of the best life to lead forbade him to take any position that was not fully justifiable by the highest standards there are, namely those of reason. This was precisely the ideal that the Pyrrhoneans had abandoned.

As can be seen, Arcesilaus' Socrates (in Cooper's interpretation) could not be more different from Xenophon's Socrates (in Natali's interpretation); while the latter is a knower who does not shy away from dispensing substantive moral advice, the former discourages us from assenting to any assertion that is not fully justifiable by the highest rational standards. This particular discrepancy is characteristic of portrayals of Socrates throughout the ages. As the present volume amply demonstrates, there is a complex interaction between how one conceives the philosophical task and how one constructs the figure of Socrates from the evidence available. As for the additional and inevitable interaction between the exegete's own philosophical *credo* and the varied ways in which the varied evidence on Socrates is interpreted, it gives us the (not too unwelcome) certainty that there will in future be many more volumes like the present one.

The ambivalence registered in the writings of a number of early Christian writers to the figure of Socrates further testifies to its enduring authority. An interesting study of the early Christian reception of the Socratic inheritance concludes our volume. It is signed by Michael Frede, alas since deceased. As he shows, Socrates' trial for impiety provided early Christians facing martyrdom with an effective argument against the pagan authorities which persecuted them. Indeed, pagans throughout the Roman empire, who held philosophy in high regard and viewed Socrates as a paradigmatic philosopher, generally acknowledged the nobility of his freely accepted death. Knowing this, Christians facing prosecution for their faith found it expedient to emphasize the similarities between Socrates' case and their own. Like them, Socrates had been prosecuted for his religious beliefs, and if his condemnation to death had been unjust, so would that of Christians be. If Socrates' death had later reflected badly upon the Athenian assembly, so would in future that of Christian martyrs upon the Roman authorities. But this particular strategic intent, Frede also demonstrates, was counterbalanced by another one, stemming from the Christians' wish to dissociate themselves from the prevailing pagan culture which forbade proselytizing and imposed participation in the cult of State deities. To achieve this second aim, ancient Christian writers, as interpreted by Frede, deliberately sought to undermine pagan philosophy in general and Socrates, its central figure, in particular. One way or another, therefore, early Christian interest in Socrates tended to be strategic and polemical rather than genuine and philosophical. This, so Frede suggests, explains why their writings do not display 'a deep understanding of the actual Socrates' (p. 202). *Pace* Frede, however, this is not true of all early Christian writers, as Augustine's *City of God* (bk VIII, chapter 3) shows. Augustine's remarks on Socrates, while not especially profound or original, are nevertheless informed by a genuine interest in the history of philosophy. What's more, coming as they do from a master of polemics, they are notable for the dispassionate and objective tone in which they are written.

Remembering Socrates is not an easy read and, for the most part, is not to be recommended for undergraduate consumption. It contains some very good arguments and some very fine scholarship, often in the same articles. As such, it should be of considerable interest not only to ancient philosophers but also to classicists concerned with the *longue durée* history of Platonism. The book is well produced but lacks an

index locorum. Misprints and other blemishes are: ‘felt in love’ for ‘fell in love (p. 6), *sōprosune* for *sōphrosunē* (p. 9), ‘is’ should be added before ‘his focus’ on p. 113, line 9, ‘the’ should be deleted before ‘Meno’ on p. 136, line -12, ‘to’ should be deleted before ‘assent’ on the last line of p. 174, and ‘question’ should be deleted before ‘to ask on the other side’ on p. 178, line 22.

Suzanne Stern-Gillet
The University of Bolton
s.stern-gillet@bolton.ac.uk